

## THE PROTECTIVE FORCES IN THE WORLD \*

By RT. REV. L. H. BRENT

"Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.

"And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, a host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?

"And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

"And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."—2 Kings vi. 14-17.

THERE is a prominent significance to this beautiful incident, which, redolent with faith, is wafted to us from the far distance on the strong wings of spiritual history. The significance is so apparent that the incident itself preaches the sermon: to wit, the protective forces in this world, of which we are a part and in which we live, exceed in number, in strength, and in beauty the forces and tendencies that make for destruction. This is an old truth, a truth which was recognized in the early days of Christianity in a wonderful way. In those days when men were expecting the speedy return of Christ they could hardly look at the passing cloud without thinking that He who had gone from them a short time since was to come again, and perhaps at that moment the cloud might unfold and reveal the Son of Man coming in glory.

This material world is continually speaking to Christians of the spiritual world that is behind and within, and, of course, the very moment we speak of a spiritual world we speak about the great forces that make for life, for health, for joy; but, old as this truth is, we need to insist upon it in our day of analysis, of extreme realism. Why, men are so honest that they are eager to get at the very bottom of fact, no matter how ugly fact may be when they arrive in its presence. To-day the old landmarks on all sides are being uprooted and some of them removed. The Creed, the Church, the Bible, are in a state of constant siege; and as for our moral being, how it is undergoing constant assault! We think of the power of environment to pull down, and we think far more of its ability to pull down than to build up. There is that awful word "heredity;" why, it suggests an avalanche composed

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of the sins of our forefathers coming down upon our heads to crush us and prevent our aspirations from reaching achievement.

Turning from that which is within to the physical being, is there not the same condition prevailing? We are taught by science that we are surrounded by minute, determined foes, always eager to lay hold upon a weak spot, always ready to inflict some penalty upon our physical being. We can hardly turn round without having to face some very definite physical risk.

Do not mistake me; do not suppose for one instant that I am antagonistic to that splendid exhibition of courage which men have who are eager to get at the bottom of things and to discover facts; do not suppose that I mean that this analysis is bad. Far from it. Although there is such a thing as destructive analysis that has no forte of building up, yet, for the most part, I venture to believe that the efforts of those who are sifting everything are preparatory, at any rate, to the introduction of something that will aid life and make it stronger and more joyous; but the effect upon the popular mind of the conditions of the day and of the temper which holds most men is to lead them to suppose that the forces that make for destruction are greater than the forces that make for life. Whether in faith, morals, or the physical world, many of us believe that they that be with them (our foes) are more than those that are with us. The honest investigator who is conducting a reconnoissance against the enemy is eager to secure the stronghold and gain all the knowledge he is capable of acquiring, so that he may lay his plans accordingly. But many people surrender themselves to a kind of fatalism; there is no good in fear, so they say; but more and more fear weakens; their struggles against environment and heredity are too strong for men; the physical forces of resistance are lowered, so that the first foe that comes along is able to gain a foothold in their being, because we are all so filled with alarm. Now, it is necessary that many of us should have our eyes opened, just as the eyes of that young man were opened by the prophet, that we may see not merely the foes that threaten, but that we may see God's forces which protect us—those vitalizing energies which God would have us make use of. It is a matter of life and death with some that this should be the case. Don't you know some people who should know that truth in order to use rightly the physical functions that are impaired, not because there is any radical disease, but because there is a fear, which has weakened the whole character, and the body also? And I say that in other cases where, perhaps, it is not a matter of life and death it will mean added effectiveness, new power, if we perceive with clearer vision that life is more abundant than death, that joy is fuller than sorrow, and that

health is nearer than disease. Danger is, I suppose, a necessary spice of life. He is a poor sort of a man who does not from time to time flip his fingers in the face of peril, but only the men and women who have a deep and full consciousness of God's horses and chariots of fire about them are capable of triumphs in the midst of such peril; so we must reflect upon the fact that the dominating force in the world is life, not death; and more than that, that it is all on our side; that "they that be with us are more than they that be with them;" otherwise it is quite obvious the universe would disintegrate—it would not hold together for a moment. It is because God has so adjusted the natural forces that the universe continues its course, and that we are able to hold our footing therein and to live our life and fulfil our vocation.

It is already, I imagine, quite obvious why I have chosen this subject. Are not a large number of those before me to-night called by God to open the eyes of those who as yet cannot see that the city is surrounded by the hosts of the Most Holy and the Most High? It is the function of the men and women of God to open the eyes of the blind; it is the function of a preacher not so much to defend by subtle argument the attacks that are made upon Church and Creed, as to point out all the majesty and power and life-giving vitality that is enshrined in these. Negative defence is not what the prophet attempted when the Syrian hosts came against the city. He turned to the hosts of God; they encompassed the place where he dwelt. And so, I say, it is the part of the preacher to point to God Himself in the midst of the Church—to truth unfolding itself in a practical way in the life of the individual. It is for the preacher always—no matter if he is speaking boldly against vice—to sound his warning, lifting people up to the throne of righteousness, which is their inheritance and their right; and in like manner it is the function of the physician and nurse to open the eyes of the sick to all the life-giving forces that lie about them. He who fights merely with technical skill and knowledge is using only half the power at his command; on the other hand, he who uses faith without means—without those triumphs of science of which we are so sure—is degrading faith into superstition. He who fights against the discoveries of science is fighting against God; but it is for the physician and nurse to combine the two.

Now, only those who have a vision can give a vision; the goal of the blind, whether he be leader or led, is always the ditch. And how we should remember this—we who are so responsible for the health of our fellows; we should remember that the power to open the eyes of the sufferer to a vision of the vitalizing forces that lie about cannot be donned or doffed like a uniform, but is a fruit of the character. Take

the spiritual skill and put it where it will be hand-in-hand with the scientific knowledge of to-day, and what a tremendous force we have. It is not so much what a person says or does, but the atmosphere that is created. A spiritual personality will create a spiritual atmosphere. A person who is thinking truth will impart a vision to the patient without, perhaps, saying a single word. My mind goes back to my island home, and the sweet face of a patient, industrious nurse rises before me. She is giving her time to those savage people among whom she lives with self-sacrifice, righteousness, and joy, and her skill is effective; but there is something more than her skill that is working among those natives, though she is unconscious of it. We see how her spiritual vision is imparting to those people something that gives them a new brightness and power. So I say to those who have this wonderful vision, to see to it that they do not merely depend upon what is scientific, but, oh, depend above all upon Him who is the incarnate Wisdom, who is the Source of vitality, who is Life!

The ideal of a hospital is what? It seems to me it is this: a place where, first of all, there shall be a new cheer in the waiting-room. What a place of anxiety that waiting-room is! Haven't you felt it so when you have gone into the midst of sufferers who have been waiting for examination? Suppose a person with wise personality were to be put down among the patients, telling them of Christ in the hospital—Christ, the power that stands for life; suppose one were to bring into that waiting-room such information, such an opening up of spiritual things, such a vision, as would enable the patient to perceive the hospital encompassed with horses and chariots of fire—that medicine would score new triumphs hitherto unheard of. Ofttimes where there is a minimum of technical knowledge and a maximum of faith, the patient recovers beyond the expectation of those who are waiting upon him; on the other hand, how often a patient has slipped away and gone beyond this world when we have been quite conscious that that person had no business to die. And why? Because he had not a power to enable the eyes to perceive the horses and chariots of fire. If matter has power over mind, if environment affects character, then the converse is equally true, that the mind has power over the body. This is a doctrine that has been pressed to such an extent as to be extremely dangerous, but the true remedy is, not to react into medical materialism, but to take what is good from this doctrine and place it in the shrine of the triumphs of medicine and surgery, and insist that faith and skill, that science and belief, should work hand-in-hand. In our day of materialism it is a matter of vital importance that we who know spiritual things should endeavor to spiritualize the material: and I am going to give you two

practical, simple illustrations of what I mean—bring the horses and chariots of God right into the midst of common life.

Take the old, sweet custom of saying a grace before meals; it is no mere bare form; it is a steadfast opening of the whole of the nature, so that we may draw from God's garners the most they have to give; and if the spiritual power of such a prayer before meals were realized, how little gluttony and intemperance there would be, and how much more mental energy would we gather from the food that comes from God's hands.

Once again: there is a moment that comes at least once in every twenty-four hours when nature gives us a great opportunity to exercise a most splendid faith, and that is when the day's work is over, and when sleep—the sweet tide of sleep—catches us in its embrace. Sleep is faith's daily opportunity. We take ourselves, prior to the closing of our eyes, and we lay ourselves in God's hands by a conscious prayer, asking God to wrap round us all His vital forces and to care for us through the hours of darkness.

"God, who made this earth and heaven,  
Darkness and light;  
Who for toil the day has given,  
For rest the night."

God expects us during the day to expend our forces; yes, and to open ourselves to anxiety, it may be; but when the day is ended God expects us to lay both ourselves and our burdens in His arms, so that worry by night is more of a weakness than many of us realize. Your work is not going to be done any better to-morrow by virtue of your worry and anxiety by night.

I don't want you to think that it is possible always, at all times, to lay aside our cares with our clothes, but I do say this is the normal thing to do, and it is a habit into which we should grow; it is a spiritualizing of one of the common things in every twenty-four hours.

There is a storehouse of energizing forces with its doors wide open for us to enter and draw therefrom to clothe our nakedness and feed our hunger.

Yet a time will come when all the skill and faith that can be exerted will be insufficient to meet the enemy, when the arch-fiend, Death, will swoop down upon us; perhaps it will be at the close of a long career; perhaps, when under the strain of some great, unselfish act, we expose ourselves to the forces that make for death; perhaps it will be hidden in a mystery that we cannot fathom; but the day will come when the forces that be with them will *seem* to be greater than the forces that be with us; but it is only a seeming. You and I have seen the mark of

recognition on the face of some dying friend; and those of us who to-day place our feet firmly on that fact, that the greatest and fullest fact in life is God, those of us who do strive to gain a clearer vision of God's protective forces, will at last, when our moment comes to cut the thread here and go beyond, find that the horses and chariots of fire are waiting on the other side of the grave to carry us up into the presence of Him who is our Creator, our Joy, and our Life.

May God in His mercy grant His richest blessings upon the Guild of St. Barnabas; may He enable all its members to stand by this great fact: that life is the triumphant force, and not death; that we need not fear, even though we walk in the midst of peril; because he who hath put his trust in "the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

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#### OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL

THE tall gray building rears its massive crown,  
Silent and splendid; all the lights are low,  
And passing underneath I seem to know  
That through the long, white ward moves up and down  
With soft, firm foot and scarcely whispering gown,  
Some nurse, as silent as the winds that blow,—  
The hushed night winds that wander to and fro,—  
With words of comfort for the weary town.

Outside the lighted windows of the ward,  
Beyond the peaceful silence and God's sleep,  
Torn by a bitter conscience' keen-set sword,  
Stabbed by an age-old sorrow driven deep,  
How many wounded through the darkness steal—  
Hearts that no herb nor any hand can heal!

WILL H. OGILVIE in the *London Outlook*.

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WE get back our mete as we measure—  
We cannot do wrong and feel right,  
Nor can we give pain and gain pleasure—  
For justice avenges each slight.  
The air for the wing of the sparrow,  
The bush for the robin and wren,  
But always the path that is narrow  
And straight for the children of men.

ALICE CARY.